

EDITORIAL: Continue fines until ed funding found

- By: [Capitol Hill Times Staff](#)
- June 22, 2016
- [editorials opinion](#)

For almost a year now, a \$100,000 fine has been levied on the state of Washington every day, as part of a contempt order handed down by the state Supreme Court last August.

It's more symbolic than anything. After a full year, the fines would total \$36.5 million, basically a drop in the bucket compared to the size of the funding gap itself.

But now the state is arguing those fines should be halted. In a brief filed earlier this month, Attorney General Bob Ferguson claimed the Legislature has been making progress on funding basic education and the contempt order should be dissolved.

There's only one problem with that: There's still no actual, concrete plan on where the money is going to come from.

Unless we're sorely mistaken, legislators are still having great difficulty coming to any sort of agreement on the actual funding mechanism. To that end, they had difficulty even agreeing on what the definition of "basic education" entails.

In the next legislative session, lawmakers must find approximately \$3.5 billion per biennium to meet the state's paramount duty. That doesn't include the \$2 billion legislators have cobbled together since the 2012 McCleary decision.

Progress? Yes, \$2 billion is better than nothing. But enough progress? Obviously not.

Lawyers for those that filed suit against the state over education funding filed their own motion in response to Ferguson's request, urging the court to maintain its pressure on the Legislature. The plaintiffs say this year's sessions adjourned without any details about how to increase K-12 funding, while lawmakers essentially kicked the can down the road until after the election.

We agree wholeheartedly.

It's one thing if, as Ferguson claims, lawmakers have a plan in place that identifies the steps needed to meet its paramount duty. But knowing what steps you need to take, and actually taking them are two very different things.

Frankly, we won't know until after the November election what the makeup of our state Legislature is, and that will obviously dictate what approach is taken to fill that funding gap (or if any approach is taken at all, lest legislators want to play with fate and risk the further ire of the state Supreme Court).

Now is not the time to loosen the screws on the politicians tasked with figuring out how to fund our state's public schools. What kind of message are we sending if we do?

We're talking about the education of more than a million students across more than 2,000 public schools in the state. Progress isn't enough.

Until there's a full solution in place, and agreed upon, those \$100,000 fines should continue to pile up.